

A BRIEF SKETCH OF THE
MORRIS MOVEMENT
AND OF THE FIRM FOUNDED BY
WILLIAM MORRIS TO CARRY OUT
HIS DESIGNS AND THE INDUSTRIES
REVIVED OR STARTED BY HIM
WRITTEN TO COMMEMORATE THE FIRM'S
FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY
IN JUNE 1911



LONDON: PRIVATELY PRINTED FOR
MORRIS & COMPANY, Decorators, Ltd.
449, Oxford St. and Merton Abbey, Surrey
MCMXI

Spec coll.

NK

1120

M87

1911

Chiswick

For
Jack Walsdorf
a great

Morris hunter

Emerson G. Walling
20 May 81



Hollzer, phot.

*William Morris, aet 37
from the Portrait by G. F. Watts in the
National Portrait Gallery*

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Original Trade Mark of the Firm
designed by Madox Brown

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THE HISTORY OF THE MORRIS MOVEMENT

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PREFACE

NO attempt has been made in the following little book to deal with any of the multifarious activities which engaged the life of William Morris, other than the special one of his artistic productions and the industry founded by him. His writings (poems, prose romances, lectures, and verse and prose translations) occupy twenty-four volumes in the forthcoming library edition, and in themselves constitute more than the life-work of many great writers. These contain his idealistic theories of life and labour, which form an important element of the "Morris Movement" in its broader sense, and as it is being

preached and to some extent put into practice in America and in Germany to-day.

The Kelmscott Press, which has revolutionized English printing, and for which he designed with his own hand an enormous number of title-pages, borders, and ornaments, which remain supreme above all their imitations, is not mentioned, for the reason that it was a private undertaking, and not connected with the Morris Firm. Long before the Kelmscott Press was started, Morris had projected the printing of fine books, and in conjunction with Sir Edward Burne-Jones, who made the designs, had himself cut thirty-six wood-blocks for an edition of his "Earthly Paradise," which never appeared. He also designed and cut a number of blocks for "Love is Enough."

The firm of Morris and Company was so far associated in this work that it cut and supplied the frontispiece block for a volume of poems by Miss Christina Rossetti, from her brother's design. The block bears an imprint, "MMF & Co."

Fine illuminated manuscripts, one of them running into hundreds of pages, and all distinguished by exquisite workmanship, occupied his leisure hours for about three and a half years, from 1870 onwards, and remain as wonderful examples of what can be accomplished by a man with a genius for every kind of craftsmanship and an absolute contempt for the ordinary limitations of time.

Besides all this, Morris was a man of boundless outdoor activities, especially in connection with his political Utopian propaganda which was partly respon-

sible for his untimely death. When all these things are considered, the quantity of original designs that he produced for wall-papers, chintzes, tapestries, silks, carpets, wall-paintings, and even stained glass, together with the time given up to researches in dyeing, weaving, cotton-printing, tapestry, and all the other industries revived by him, will appear little short of miraculous.

1911.

THE MORRIS MOVEMENT



"Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful."

.
"Time was when everyone that made anything, made a work of art besides a useful piece of goods; *and it gave them pleasure to do it.* Whatever I doubt, I have no doubt of that."

WILLIAM MORRIS.

FOR the history of the "Morris Movement," to use a popular phrase covering all the decorative reforms introduced by William Morris and his circle, one has to go back to the year 1853, when the future poet-artist, by one of the happy chances of fortune, found

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himself entered at Exeter College, Oxford, as a fellow-freshman with his lifelong friend Edward Burne-Jones. The Tractarian influence, which still hung heavy in the air of the University city and filled the thoughts of serious-minded youth, claimed these two also, and designed them at first for the church; but within a couple of years, as the world of romance and art opened before their eyes, ecclesiastical aspirations were abandoned for an intellectual environment in which Gothic architecture, poetry, and Malory's "Morte d'Arthur" played an important part. It was at this time that Morris first discovered himself to be a poet, and a characteristic remark of his which has been preserved, after reading aloud his first unpublished poem, is that "if this is poetry, it is very easy to write." Nor did he ever consider poetry worth writing unless he could

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be doing something else, some manual work, at the same time. It was an age of ardent ideas and ardent friendships. By 1855 Morris and Burne-Jones had surrounded themselves with a small band of kindred spirits who assumed the title of a "Brotherhood," and by way of outlet for their opinions founded the now famous "Oxford and Cambridge Magazine," a more serious undertaking than the little "Germ" of the earlier "Pre-Raphaelite" brotherhood founded by Rossetti, Millais, and Holman Hunt. In many minds there exists a confusion as to these two brotherhoods, and some people imagine that Morris and Burne-Jones were associated with the movement of the "P. R. B." As a matter of fact they came ten years later than that brief but brilliant episode, and did not make Rossetti's acquaintance, even if they knew of his work, before 1855.

The Oxford
"Brother-
hood"

The
"P. R. B."
an earlier
movement

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When they did, there was a complete and instant fusion between the newer men and the older one. Both in poetry and in painting Rossetti furnished an influence too deep to over-estimate, and his friendship at this time contributed more than anything else to determine the career of art on which Burne-Jones as well as Morris started as soon as their University course was finished. Morris at first entered Street's office as an architect, and moved up with him from Oxford to London. He soon grew tired of office routine, however, and left it, retaining as his most valuable acquisition the friendship of Philip Webb who was a fellow pupil.

Red Lion
Square

The year 1857 found Morris and Burne-Jones installed together as "artists" (a profession then looked upon as odd and hardly respectable) in London, and by an appropriate coincidence in the rooms

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at 17, Red Lion Square which had been occupied a decade earlier by Rossetti and Deverell, in the days of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. Round their later occupancy a halo of romance and mythology has gathered, and (says Mr. J. W. Mackail) "from the incidents which occurred or were invented there, a sort of Book of the Hundred Merry Tales was formed, of which Morris was the central figure." The rooms were unfurnished, and "from this trifling circumstance came the beginning of Morris's work as a decorator and manufacturer. The arts of cabinet-making and upholstery had at this time reached the lowest point to which they ever sank. Ugliness and vulgarity reigned in them unchecked. . . . It was this state of things which drove Morris and Webb to take up the designing and making of objects of common use on their own account, and which led a

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few years later to the formation of the firm of Morris and Company." The first furniture made was described by Rossetti in a letter as "intensely mediaeval—tables and chairs like incubi and succubi." The panels were painted by the artists themselves, including Rossetti, with figure subjects from the romances and from the story of Dante and Beatrice.

The Oxford
Frescoes

The close of their first year found the whole group of friends engaged on their first decorative undertaking, the painting of the bays in the Oxford Union debating hall with subjects from the "Morte d'Arthur." The history of this memorable but ill-fated venture does not need re-telling. A record of it, with illustrations of the so-called "frescoes" (so far as they still exist) was published a year or two ago at Oxford. To Morris himself the consequences were far-reaching,

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as during the work he became engaged, and early in the year following its completion (1859) he was married, and set about planning a permanent home.

This was the origin of the famous Red House, at Upton, designed by Philip Webb, on which so much artistic thought and love were lavished. As in the case of the rooms at Red Lion Square, there was nothing that could be bought fit to put into it, neither furniture, nor ornament, nor wall-papers, nor stuffs of any kind. Everything had to be designed, and when made decorated, by the artist and his friends. Out of this necessity, and the difficulties which it involved, grew the project of founding a sort of firm, an association of artist friends, to design and produce all the decorative requirements of life. "The first notion of the firm of Morris and Company," relates Mr. Mackail, in the Life which

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has been already quoted, "the name and wares of which have since become so widely spread, sprang up among friends in talk and cannot be assigned to any single author. It was in a large measure due to Madox Brown; but perhaps even more to Rossetti, who, poet and idealist as he was, had business qualities of a high order." It is however on record that after many consultations, lasting over two years, the project took shape and resulted in the formation of the firm known as Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co., having as partners or associates William Morris, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Ford Madox Brown, Edward Burne-Jones, Philip Webb, P. P. Marshall (an engineer and surveyor) and C. J. Faulkner, an Oxford Don, who gave up his college work for the pursuit of commercial art. Mr. Arthur Hughes, the painter, was also among the first associ-

Morris,
Marshall,
Faulkner
and Co.

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ates of the firm, but resigned before it was fairly started.

In April 1861 the new firm entered on its career with a minute capital of £1 per share subscribed by the seven members, and an unsecured loan of £100. Its business and working premises were at 8, Red Lion Square, where a small kiln was built for firing glass and tiles. A circular issued at the time describes its operations under the heading of "Fine Art Workmen in Painting, Carving, Furniture, and the Metals." Having given a list of the members and explained the benefits of co-operation, the circular proceeds:

The first
Circular

"These artists having for many years been deeply attached to the study of the Decorative Arts of all times and countries, have felt more than most people the want of some one place where they could either obtain or get produced work

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of a genuine and beautiful character," and sets forth the complete list of the firm's undertakings, which comprise mural decoration, carving generally as applied to architecture, stained glass, metal work, including jewellery, furniture, embroidery, stamped leather, etc.

Artists and
Craftsmen

The artists themselves designed everything for the new firm, and in some cases even executed the work; but from the beginning a clever all-round craftsman was employed in the person of Mr. George Campfield (who died recently, in May 1910), and in course of time he was supplemented by a group of workers, including Messrs. Albert and Harry Goodwin, Charles Holloway, Napier Hemy, Frank Brangwyn, and others, many of whom have since become painters of note. A great deal of historic early work was executed by Mr. Fairfax Murray, then acting as assistant to the firm, and

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by various ladies, mostly relations of the partners, who were pressed into the service as embroidresses and painters of tiles.

The Exhibition of 1862 gave the new firm its first chance of advertisement, and brought it into conflict also with the established trades, who viewed its productions with considerable jealousy. Painted tiles, stained glass, furniture, and tapestries (otherwise woollen embroidery work done on coarse serge) formed the staple of the exhibit, the most important outcome of which was to bring about relations with G. F. Bodley, the architect, who was then entering on his great church building career, and who entrusted the new firm with commissions for stained glass for a fine series of churches, beginning with St. Michael's, Brighton; All Saints, Selsey; Bradford, Yorks; and St. Mar-

The 1862
Exhibition

Early
Stained
Glass

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tin's on the Hill, Scarborough. Rossetti, Morris, Burne-Jones, Madox Brown, and Philip Webb all contributed notable designs for these windows and the ones which followed; the wealth of early cartoons, many of which remain in the firm's possession, and more of which were dispersed by the artists themselves, being very remarkable. A fine collection is in the Corporation Art Gallery at Birmingham.

A good deal of secular, as well as ecclesiastical, glass was produced by the firm, in accordance with its lofty views of domestic decoration, the windows in the Combination Room at Peterhouse; Burne-Jones's designs for Chaucer's "Good Women" (done for Birket Foster's house at Witley); the series of "Tristram and Iseult" by Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Madox Brown, and others; Burne-Jones's "Song of Solomon"; and

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Rossetti's fine series of " St. George and the Dragon " being amongst the best known and most successful of these achievements. Painted tile panels, illustrating the same range of romance subjects, together with fairy tales, the labours of the months, the seasons, etc., also figured plentifully in the firm's earliest work, and are of great historic interest. Specimens of this work are to be seen at Peterhouse and Queen's College, Cambridge, at The Hill, Witley, at Sandroyd House, Cobham, and elsewhere. In later days a close association with William De Morgan relieved the firm from the necessity of producing its own tiles, and in place of figure subjects it adopted the beautiful designs and colourings revived by him from old Persian, Damascus, and Hispano-Moresque art. In this present year (1911) some of the ancient pictured tiles are for the

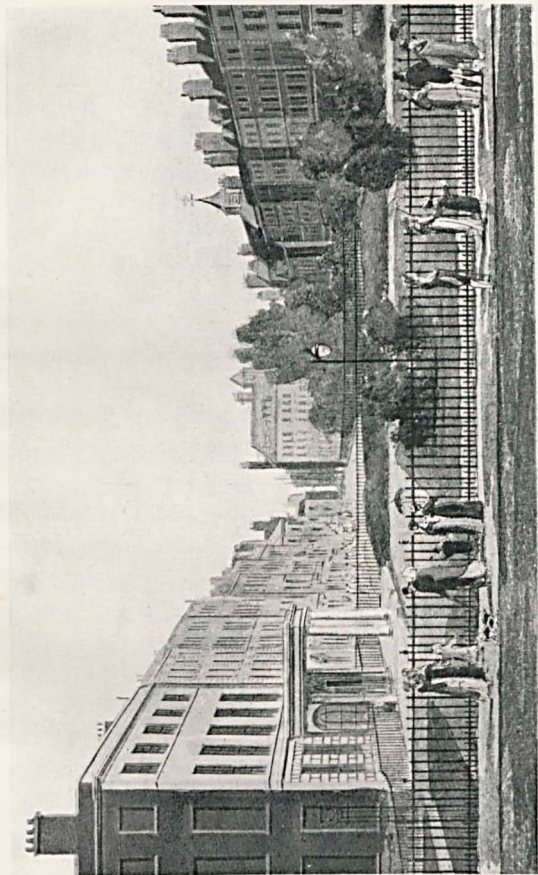
Painted
Tiles

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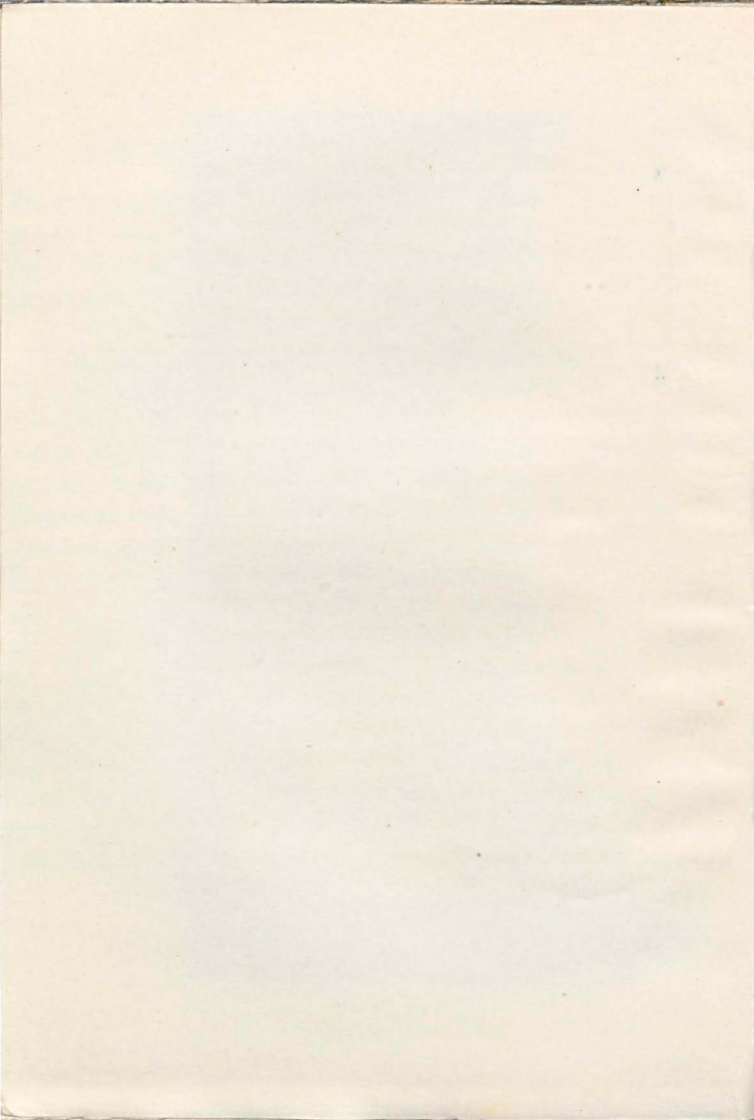
first time being reproduced, and it is satisfactory to know that the demand has not died out for these pretty decorations with their simple colouring.

No 25,
Queen
Square

In 1865 a series of unfortunate circumstances compelled Morris to abandon the Red House, which he had made so beautiful within and without, and to come up and live in London. An old house was chosen in Queen Square, Bloomsbury, and hither the workshops and offices of the Firm were also removed from their original situation in Red Lion Square. The house was No. 26 on the east side, and has since been pulled down to make room for a hospital; but for seventeen years it was the scene of Morris's busiest labours, and was very familiar to the last generation of his customers and friends, who frequented it up to the year 1877, when the more convenient present-day showrooms at



Queen Square. From an Old Print



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No. 449, Oxford Street, were taken. Morris's name is mentioned alone for the reason that by degrees the work of the firm fell more and more into his hands. Rossetti dropped off entirely, Madox Brown nearly so, and only Burne-Jones (and occasionally Philip Webb) continued to furnish cartoons of ever-increasing beauty for the stained glass industry. At this time a capable and much-needed business manager was found for the Firm in the person of Mr. Warrington Taylor, who gradually re-deemed it from the haphazard methods incidental to artistic governance, and turned what had been a severe drain on Morris's pockets into a prosperous and profitable concern. Unfortunately he only lived a few years, and was succeeded by Mr. George Wardle, an admirable draughtsman and a highly capable manager, who conducted the Firm's affairs

No. 449,
Oxford St.

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till 1890. Morris himself, in a blue blouse and surrounded by other Bohemian attributes, sat at the receipt of custom and dealt with clients in the intervals of designing the wonderful range of patterns and materials which began to flow in a steady stream from his prolific hand.

The
"Green
Dining
Room"

A commission from the authorities of the South Kensington Museum in 1867 to decorate one of the new dining-rooms brought the firm into wider public notice than it had hitherto enjoyed. The "Green Dining Room," with its painted panels of foliage and figures and its Burne-Jones windows, is still intact and unrestored, justifying the remark of one of the Directors of the Museum that though costly in the first instance it had in the long run proved the cheapest piece of work in the buildings. Cheapness of this kind is, however, apt to be

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overlooked in the present days of competitive work and cut prices.

Of the productions for which (in addition to stained glass) the Morris firm soon became famous, the first to be taken up was wall-papers. The "Trellis" paper, with a design of climbing roses by Morris and birds by Philip Webb, was designed in November 1862, and was printed by hand from blocks cut in pearwood, as it continues to be at the present day. Owing to delays in cutting, however, the first paper actually to be printed and sold was the "Daisy," an incident worth mentioning because the "Daisy," by heading the sales of Morris wall-papers practically without a break for half a century, has established what may be considered a record in the popularity of a single design.

"This first series of Morris wall-

Wall-
papers

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papers," says Mr. Mackail in his biography, "the designing of which went on rapidly for several years, culminates in the favourite and beautiful pattern known as the 'Pomegranate.'¹ Beyond it that method of decorating a surface could not go. When Morris resumed paper-designing he abandoned the innocence of those formal early designs, and struck out a larger and more mature scheme of pattern. It is the later wall-papers, with their large masses and masterly composition, that are more admirable to the eye of the artist; but in those simple early patterns there is a charm of straightforward simplicity that appeals more directly to the first childlike instinct for beauty, the sense of form and colour that is undeveloped, but so far as it reaches, perfectly true."

Morris has given his theory of wall-

¹ Actually the "Fruit" design.

paper designing in his lecture on "The Lesser Arts of Life," and to some extent in another called "Making the Best of it." "I think the real way to deal successfully with designing for wall-papers," he says in one place, "is to accept their mechanical nature frankly, to avoid falling into the trap of trying to make your paper look as if it were painted by hand."

The colouring of the wall-papers in the early days was not subject to hard-and-fast rules. Morris would alter a colouring arbitrarily if he disapproved of it or thought of something better, and many early variants exist still (such is their wonderful vitality) which are apt to produce an impression that the firm has not adhered to its standards. In course of time a series of standards was evolved which are used to the present

Standards
of Colour

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day as guides in printing and checking the colours, and from these the variations are extremely slight. Moreover, when specially beautiful colourings come to light they are adopted and reprinted, as has been the case recently with some very early trials found among the papers of G. F. Campfield,¹ and with a specimen of the "Fruit" paper on a blue ground, which had been for thirty-five years on the walls of Eton College, and was reproduced in 1904.

¹ Besides some novel colourings of the "Fruit" or "Pomegranate" and other early papers, these include bold trials of the "Trellis" with birds of a gorgeous green and gold; a lovely version of the "Vine" coloured to Mr. Morris's original drawing, and some magnificently rich colourings of the "Indian" on various grounds, especially reds, with and without gold. The latter, with the "Vine" have been so much admired that they have been exactly reproduced and are now printed (without the gold) as regular stock patterns.

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Weaving, though projected very early in the history of the Morris firm, was not actually taken in hand for several years, and followed upon a great revival of the early arts of vegetable dyeing undertaken by Morris in conjunction with the late Sir Thomas Wardle. The first experiments in dyeing were made in the coppers of the scullery at 26, Queen Square, and were confined to embroidery silks. Both there and afterwards at Leek they led on to a long series of researches by which finally the West was put in possession of the ancient and almost vanished secrets of the East.¹ In his views upon dyeing Morris was a purist of the first order, and a most convinced

Revival of
Ancient
Dyeing

¹ Morris and Company have for the past few years been supplying their own dyed silks, wools, and linen thread for the use of a revived embroidery industry in India, thereby repaying in part the debt of the Western world to the Eastern.

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Revival of
Ancient
Dyeing

conservative. "No change befell the art," he says in a lecture on the subject, "before the discovery of America. This gave the dyers one new material that was good in itself and one that was doubtful or bad. The good one was cochineal, which at first was only used for dyeing crimson; the bad material was log-wood, so fugitive a dye as to be quite worthless as a colour by itself."

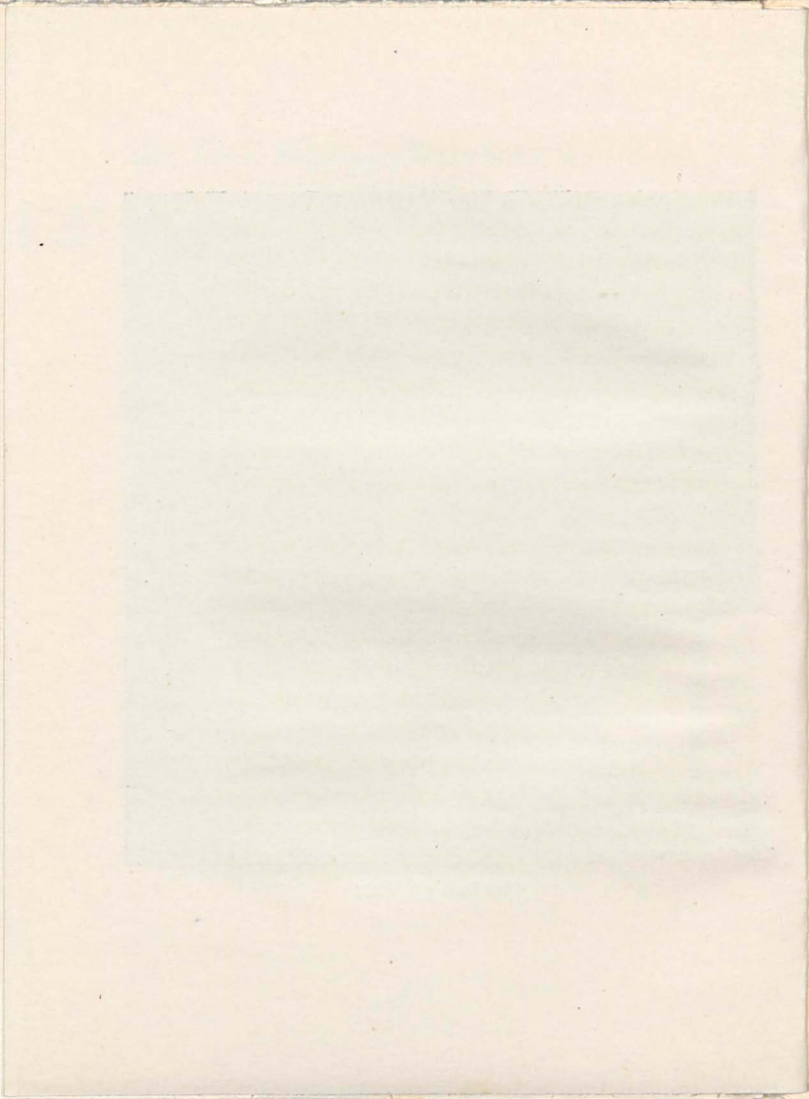
"About the year 1656 a Dutch chemist discovered the secret of getting a scarlet from cochineal (on a tin basis), and so produced a cheaper, brighter, and uglier scarlet, much to the satisfaction of the civilized world."

"In the last years of the 18th century a worthless blue was invented . . . about the same time a rather valuable yellow dye (quercitron bark) was introduced from America."

Nothing else of moment occurred "up



The Indigo Vats



THE MORRIS MOVEMENT 29

to the time of the discovery of Prussian blue dyeing in about 1810, which has cheapened and coarsened black dyeing in so far as it has taken the place of the indigo vat as a basis.

Revival of
Ancient
Dyeing

“Now these novelties, the sum of which amounts to very little, are all that make any difference between the practice of dyeing under Rameses the Great and under Queen Victoria, till about 20 years ago. Then (in 1858) came one of the most wonderful and most useless of the inventions of modern chemistry, that of the dyes made from coal-tar, producing a series of hideous colours, crude, livid, and cheap, which every person of taste loathes, but which we can by no manner of means get rid of until we are able to struggle successfully against the doom of cheap and nasty which has overtaken us. . . . It must, I suppose, be considered a negative virtue in the new

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Revival of
Ancient
Dyeing

(aniline) dyes that they are as fugitive as the older ones are stable; but even on that head I will ask you to note one thing that condemns them finally, that whereas the old dyes when fading, as all colours will do more or less, changed simply into paler tints of the same colour, and were not unpleasant to look on, the fading of the new dyes is a change into all kinds of abominable and livid hues."

Since these words were pronounced, science has redeemed her character somewhat by the introduction of alizarin dyes, based on the principle of madder, and the best alizarin dyes have been adopted by Morris and Company for some years past, but only as an addition to, not as a substitute for, the older vegetable dyes, which continue to be used by them for dyeing all the silks and wools used in their woven fabrics and em-

THE MORRIS MOVEMENT 31

broideries. The difference between Morris and Company's colours and those of ordinary trade manufacturers is almost, if not quite, as great to-day as it was at the time when William Morris's insatiable activity was wrestling with the problems of vanished Persian and Indian arts; not because he hoarded the knowledge he acquired or ever protected it in any way (very much the opposite was the case), but because trade and public both prefer cheap, novel, and striking (rather than beautiful) effects, to those which require time or trouble to produce.

Revival of
Ancient
Dyeing

Weaving, which followed on the dyeing, was, as has already been said, projected very early in the Firm's history; but owing to repeated delays and difficulties in the procuring of an old handloom was not actually started till late in the seventies. By the time the first loom

Weaving

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Weaving

was ready Morris had prepared several designs for cloths or tapestries, and had developed his artistic theories of the subject. These are most fully expressed in his lecture on "Textile Fabrics," which was delivered at the International Health Exhibition in 1884 and afterwards issued as an official handbook. Briefly they amount to a thorough disapproval of all the trivial novelties that manufacturers try to impose upon their productions, and an insistence on the fact that designs for woven fabrics, like those for pottery, glass, carpets, and everything else, must be suited to the elementary process of weaving, which consists in crossing one set of threads with another. "The patterned webs produced by mechanical weaving, if the ornament is to be effective and worth the doing, require a Gothic crispness and clearness of detail; the geometrical

structure, which is a necessity in all re-
 curring patterns, should be boldly in-
 sisted upon . . . ; the meaningless stripes
 and spots and other tormentings of the
 simple twill of the web, which are so
 common in the woven ornament of the
 18th century and our own times, should
 be carefully avoided: all these things are
 the last resource of a jaded invention
 and a contempt of the simple and fresh
 beauty that comes of a sympathetic sug-
 gestion of natural forms."

Weaving

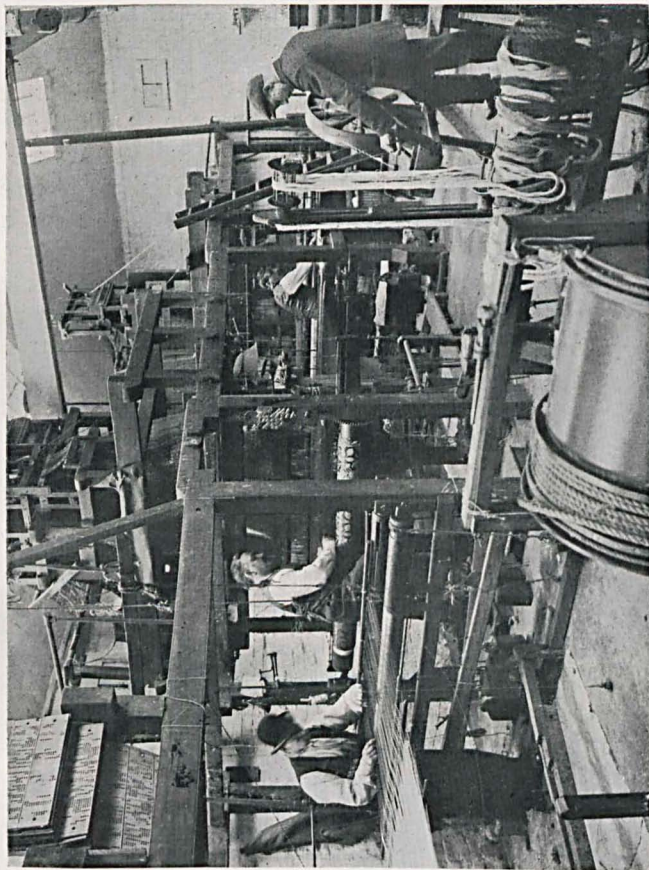
The fabrics woven by Morris and Com-
 pany, first at Queen Square and later at
 Merton Abbey, where several looms
 were installed, include woollen tapestries
 of various widths and thickness, mostly
 from one and a half to two yards wide;
 tapestries and damasks of mixed silk and
 wool, or silk and linen; damask and
 figured silks; and brocade or brocatelle,
 a particularly gorgeous type of silken

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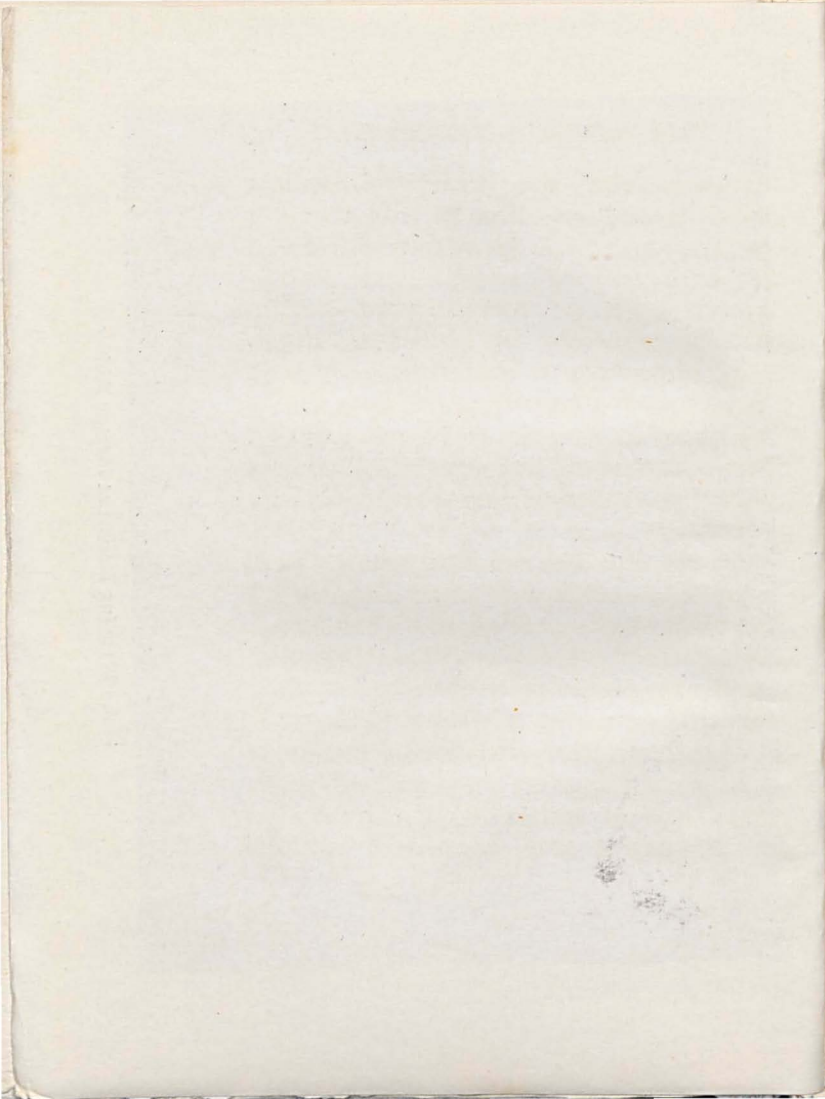
Weaving

material with a Persian design and a rich shot effect. The drawing-room at Stanmore Hall is hung with green brocattelle. Only one more sumptuous fabric was ever attempted on the Merton looms, and that was a cut velvet with gold tissue, after the pattern of the superb Venetian and Florentine webs. Morris made a magnificent design for this in orange and blue colouring, and twenty yards were produced on a special frame, at an almost fabulous cost. A rich American bought the stock, of which there now remains only a fragment of a few inches, which will probably some day grace a national museum.

Of the woollen tapestries designed by Morris, the "Peacock and Dragon" and the "Bird" are probably the favourites. The former is a large and noble pattern of mediaeval type, woven in dull reds or blues, and like the "Bruges" wall-paper,



Hand Weaving Looms at Merton Abbey



THE MORRIS MOVEMENT 35

to quote from Mr. Aymer Vallance's Weaving
"Art of William Morris," "it forms a decoration which upon the walls of a fifteenth-century building is in perfect accord with its surroundings." The "Bird" tapestry, in shades of indigo blue (it is also woven in madder red) hung round the walls of the long drawing room at Kelmscott House, and is a lovely hanging to live with. Like Keats's thing of beauty, "its loveliness increases."

Of the silk and wool tapestries, perhaps the finest is the "Dove and Rose," best known in a pale greenish colouring, but recently revived in a splendidly bold early colouring of green and purplish pink. Mr. Vallance says of this material that "apart from the beauty of the design, it has an additional beauty of texture which is peculiarly delightful; the weightier substance of the wool drawing the

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slighter-bodied surface of the silk into delicate ripples upon which the light plays with charming effect."

Machine Fabrics

For those who may admire but cannot afford these hand-woven tapestries and silks, a wide range of less costly machine-made fabrics have been gradually added by the Firm, of which all that need be said is that they are the best of their various kinds, that they are designed in a number of cases by William Morris himself, and that the colours are very carefully chosen. In particular, church decoration, which has grown to be an important branch of the Firm's work, has necessitated the introduction or revival of many strong Gothic patterns in simple, inexpensive materials.

Carpets

The weaving introduced by Morris, as soon as he had perfected his dyeing

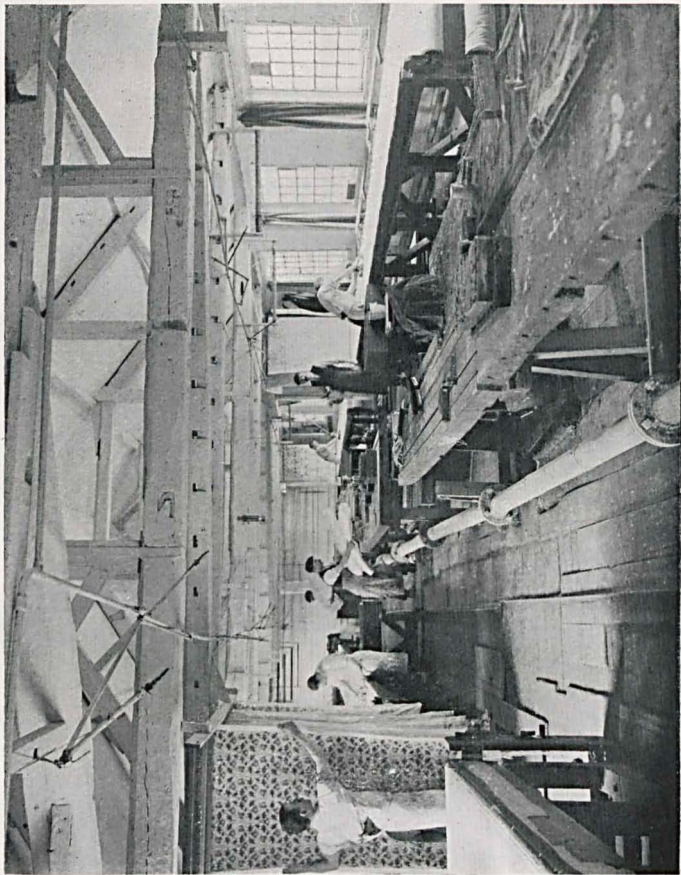
methods, included carpets—thick hand-tufted carpets—for which designs based upon Persian models were prepared. The earliest of these were woven in the stable or lecture-hall at Kelmscott House, and acquired the name of “Hammersmith” carpets from their place of origin. After 1881, when the Merton Abbey works were acquired, large carpet looms, similar in construction to the Arras looms, were built, and are still in use. The “Hammersmith” rugs and carpets are very thick, and although costly in the first instance to make, are calculated to justify themselves as heir-looms. By degrees, Morris added some fine designs for the other cheaper forms of carpeting in general use, viz. Wilton and Axminster pile, Brussels, and Kidderminster or three-ply hand-loom carpets. These last, with their bright cheerful colourings and little gay designs,

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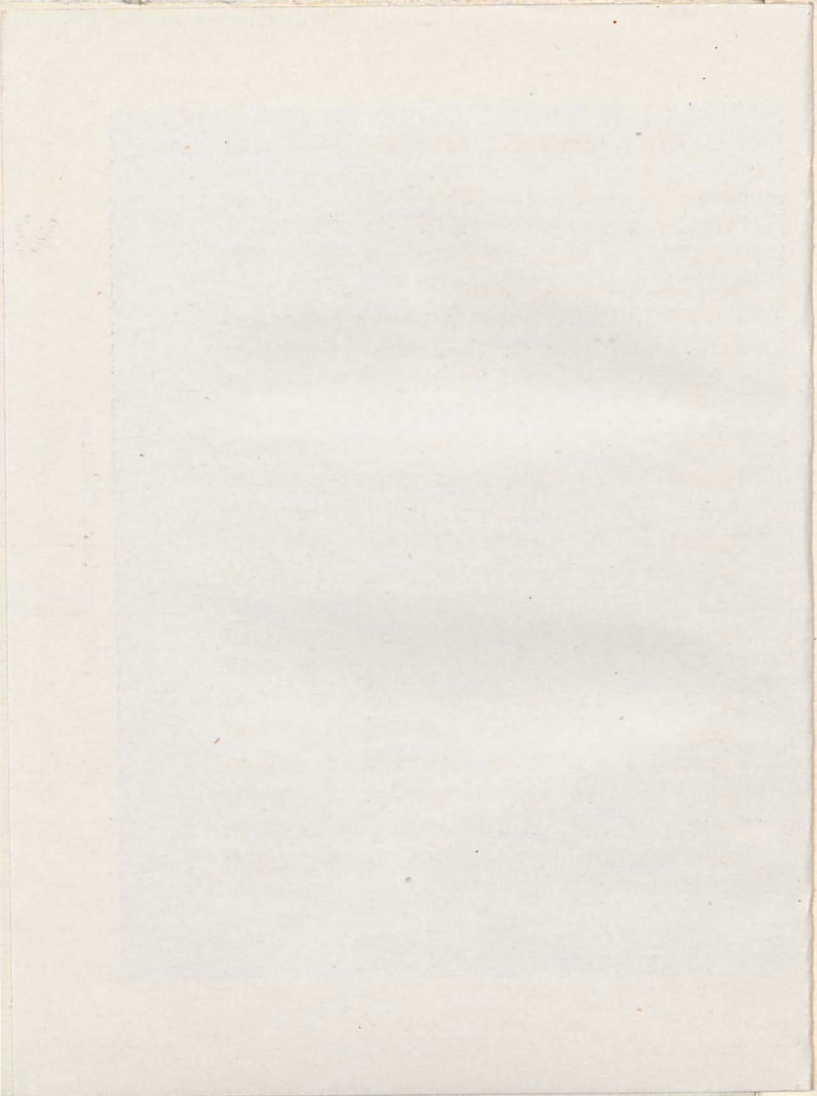
are of widespread popularity, abroad as well as in their own country. They have been copied in one or two instances by unscrupulous firms, but no manufacturers have succeeded in matching the distinctive blend of colours which Morris's artist eye enabled him to construct. Later, he designed and introduced some patterns for linoleum, one of which is still in considerable and constant demand.

Cotton
Printing

The resuscitation of natural dyes led not only to the weaving of silk and woollen fabrics, but also to the printing of cottons and velveteens. In these days, when hand-printed cottons are common, and many of them good, the difficulties which attended Morris's first efforts are not easy to realize. But for some years they were a source of considerable expense and loss which was only by de-



Printing Morris Chintzes



grees made up. Designs for chintzes, as Morris preferred to call his printed cottons, began to be made about 1881. Mr. Mackail says of them:

“Perhaps the most important new development that the business took after it was removed to Merton Abbey was the production of printed cotton goods—the celebrated ‘Morris chintzes,’ which soon became more widely known and more largely used than his woven stuffs or wall-papers. Their success was so great that deliberate or unconscious imitations of them soon began to be produced. Their adaptability to many small purposes gave them an advantage over the paper hangings and tapestries. To hang a room with good hand-printed paper is a matter of serious expense to many people who would like to do it, but do not very acutely realize the difference between it and a machine-printed

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Morris
Chintzes

paper that can be produced for one-sixth and bought for one-third of the price. But a mere scrap of these bright and beautifully patterned chintzes can be used to light up a room, as a curtain, or the cover of a chair or a cushion, or in twenty other ways; and perhaps the primary use for which these fabrics were meant, that of wall hangings, is the one to which they have been most seldom applied."

The earliest chintzes, and those the most beautiful ones, all depend for their effect on the process of "discharging" indigo, there being no blue that is so perfect and so true as indigo, or on the whole so "fast." The cotton cloth is first dyed to a uniform dark shade of blue in one of the large indigo vats, and is printed with a bleaching reagent which either reduces or removes the blue colour as required by the design. Mordants are

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then printed on the white parts, where red has to come, and the whole cloth is dyed a second time with madder. The process is repeated a third time for yellow, the three colours being superposed one on each other to give green, purple, or orange. All loose colouring matter is then cleared away, and the colours are set by passing the fabric through soap at almost boiling heat. The final treatment is to spread the cloth on the grass with its printed face to the light, so that the whites may be purified and all fugitive colour removed in nature's own way. This process is called "crofting," and the meadows round the works in fine weather are bright and gay with long strips of many-coloured material stretched upon the buttercups and daisies.

Morris
Chintzes

The printing of velveteens, or cotton

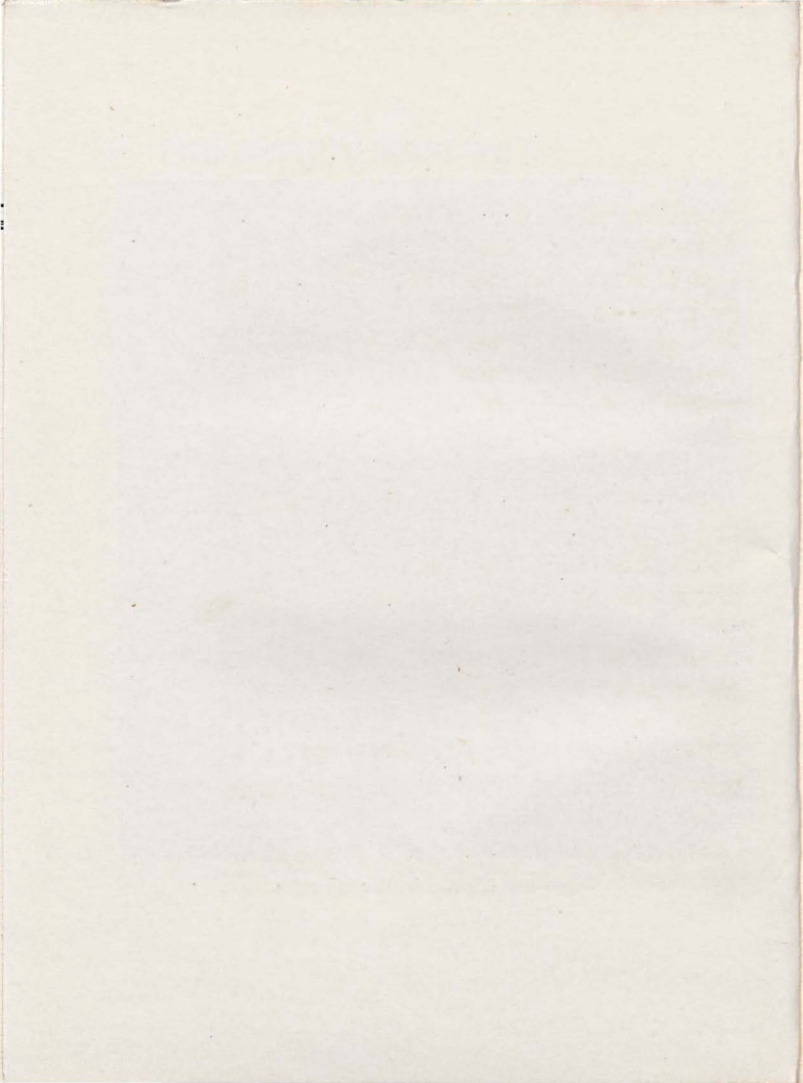
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Printed
Velvets

velvets, is carried out much in the same way as the chintzes, and the effect is naturally much richer on account of the pile. Morris was specially pleased with these handsome fabrics, which cost very little and have extraordinary lasting qualities. Mr. Vallance, in his "Art of William Morris" (1897), wrote of them: "It is about 10 or 12 years since pattern-printing on white velveteen was first attempted by Morris and Co., a branch in which their productions have hitherto proved to be unrivalled—the designs, of course, being Morris's and such as no hand but his could produce. Of these the 'Acanthus,' though early in point of date, has hardly been surpassed for simple dignity by later designs, while the 'Florence' and the 'Cherwell' are both admirable as patterns for the particular material. There is one, however, than which it is impossible to conceive



Washing Chintz in the Wandle



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anything more splendid of its kind. It is known as the 'Severn.'" For several years, after they became common, the printing of cotton velvets was practically discontinued by the Firm. But recently they have been revived in all the original designs and colourings, and may be obtained in the ordinary way.

Embroidery, in wool on serges, was one of the earliest undertakings of Morris and Company, and beautiful examples of figures and foliage subjects, done in this way by ladies associated with the Firm, still remain. When Morris took up dyeing, he began with embroidery silks, and produced a range of colours such as has never been seen in Western lands before. In his own hands the silks often had accidental or parti-coloured effects of great beauty, but the standardized colours have remained unique and

Embroideries

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special to the Firm, and are in great request always. Morris also designed a great number of subjects for embroideries on silk and on linen, most of which can be worked in the hand, instead of on a frame, by means of darning stitch in twist silks. Church embroideries in floss silk, on the Merton damasks, form a considerable portion of the Firm's work in this respect.

Arras
Tapestries

Before leaving the subject of textiles and hand embroidery, it will be convenient to add a note upon the noblest of all the arts practised or revived by William Morris, viz. the art of weaving Arras, or, as it is sometimes called, Gobelin tapestry. This was a dead art in England, where in fact it never flourished greatly except under the Stuarts when the Mortlake industry was kept going by Royal interest and patronage. Tapestries were

made for a time in Soho, in the eighteenth century, and that is practically all until the attempted revival of the art (on Beauvais looms) at Windsor late in the nineteenth century, when some dexterous but shockingly inartistic work was produced under French supervision. This had only a brief career, and when Morris thought of reviving the art somewhat on the lines of the glorious early tapestries of Flanders, he had to reconstruct both the high-warp loom and the method of weaving out of a dictionary of ancient "Arts et Métiers." Morris's opinion of contemporary French work was that "it was a melancholy sight. . . . The workmen are as handy at it as only Frenchmen can be, but their ingenuity is put to the greatest pains for the least result. It would be a mild word to say that what they make is worthless; it is more than that; it has a corrupting and

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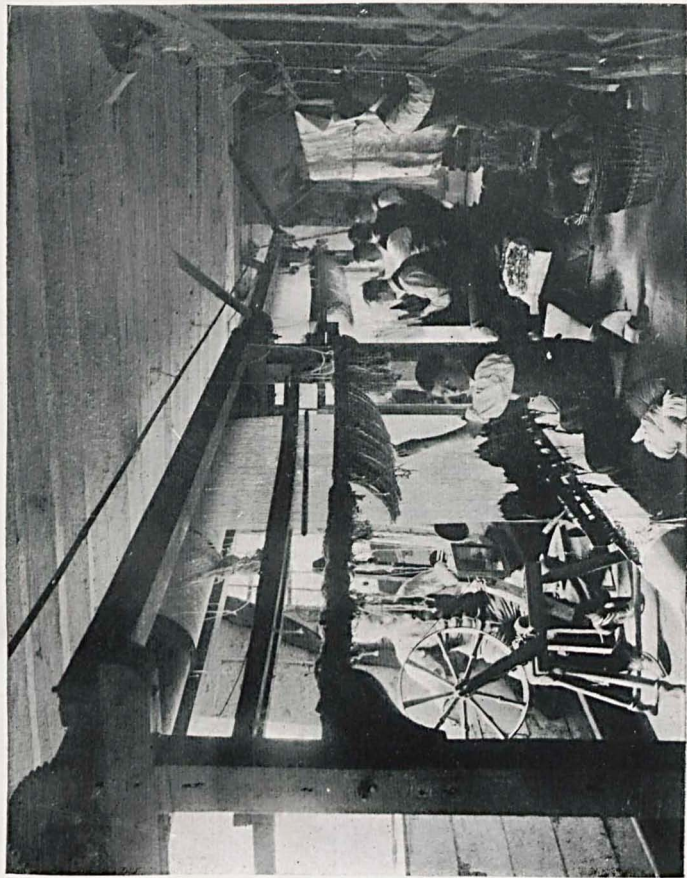
deadening influence upon all the lesser arts of France since it is always put forward as the very standard and crown of all that those arts can do at the best: a more idiotic waste of human labour and skill it is impossible to conceive." That was the Gobelins factory—"a hatching nest of stupidity," as he called it, "which changed tapestry weaving from a fine art, and a noble, into a mere upholsterer's toy."

From such a source Morris scorned even to borrow the technique. He worked it out with that infallible genius for handicrafts which was born in him, and wove, with his own hands and with his own wools, on an upright loom erected in his bedroom at Hammersmith, a large tapestry of birds and acanthus leaves which remains a masterpiece of workmanship. It was characteristic also that while this laborious task was in hand he

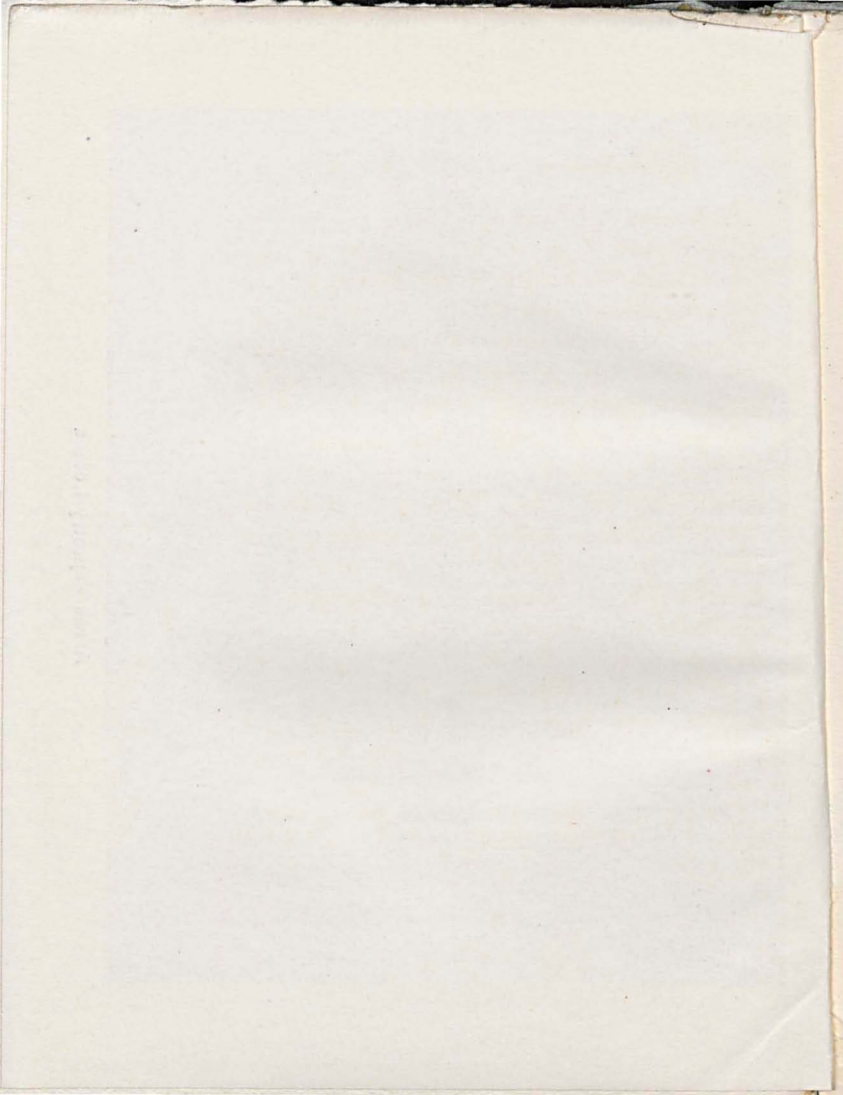
used to rise two hours earlier so as not to interrupt his ordinary work, and that while he was weaving he often composed poems as well. Arras looms were afterwards set up at Merton Abbey, on which first Mr. Dearle and later, under his guidance, a number of boys were taught the craft. In 1881 the first figure subject, Mr. Walter Crane's "Goose Girl" was executed, from the cartoon now hanging on the staircase of the Victoria and Albert Museum, where also are two of the later tapestries, a pair of angels by Sir Edward Burne-Jones, and the Four Seasons, by Morris himself. After the first panel, practically all the tapestry subjects woven at Merton Abbey were designed by Burne-Jones, the series culminating in the magnificent Stanmore tapestries, representing scenes from the Arthurian legend. Three replicas from this series

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are in the Corporation Art Gallery at Birmingham. The Eton War Memorial, erected in 1905, consists principally of a pair of fine tapestries hanging beside the altar, which, with a third (Burne-Jones's "Adoration of the Kings") filling the space above the altar itself, cover the east wall of the College Chapel; and others are to be found scattered in various public buildings or churches, including the well-known "Adoration" which Morris himself presented to his old college, Exeter. Many also are abroad, or in the colonies, and the quickness with which they passed out of hand has prevented the world in general from seeing or knowing anything about the wonderful and beautiful productions which have issued unceasingly from the Merton looms. The last great Burne-Jones subject to be executed was the "Passing of Venus," from the "Roman de la Rose,"



Arras Tapestry Looms



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which was left unfinished at his death. This forms a panel 20 feet broad and 9 feet high. It has been exhibited at the New Gallery, and by the British Government at Brussels, and is regarded by many people as one of the most splendid achievements of English art.¹

Latterly the firm have tried with some success the experiment of weaving designs by modern artists, commissions for this purpose being given to Mr. Byam Shaw, Mr. Heywood Sumner, and Mrs. Adrian Stokes. Another novel departure was the weaving of a replica of the all-but-perished painting of Edward the Confessor in Westminster Abbey, to hang beside it on the back of the choir sedilia. Very successful reproductions

¹ Since these words were written, the "Passing of Venus" has been utterly destroyed in the fire which consumed the British Section at the Brussels Exhibition.

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have also been made of an early German tapestry in the South Kensington Museum, of Botticelli's "Primavera," and of the famous Lippo Lippi "Annunciation" in the National Gallery. Apart from these exceptions which lent themselves for the purpose, the Firm has abstained from copying pictures in tapestry.

Tapestry Repairing

The repairing of ancient tapestries is a different art altogether from the weaving of them, so far as concerns the method employed, and is done better by French hands than by any others. In fact much of the so-called repairing done by embroidresses in England is simply darning, and is a serious injury and disfigurement to the tapestry. A commission to repair some of the Royal tapestries at Windsor and Holyrood, as well as the great series of Gobelins and Brussels tapestries belonging to the Earl of

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Leicester at Holkham, necessitated the foundation of a special workshop for this class of undertaking, and since the year 1909 Morris and Company have been employing a large staff of skilled French workers trained to the craft at the Gobelins and in the best ateliers of Paris. Under them English apprentices are being taught to acquire the requisite delicacy of eye and finger, whereby perished tapestries can be so reverently restored that though a third or more of the web may be new it is impossible to distinguish it from the old.

The early stained glass of the firm has already been mentioned, and it is only necessary to add that the industry has been carried on in a flourishing condition at Merton Abbey ever since. In addition to the long series of cartoons by Sir Edward Burne-Jones, most of which are

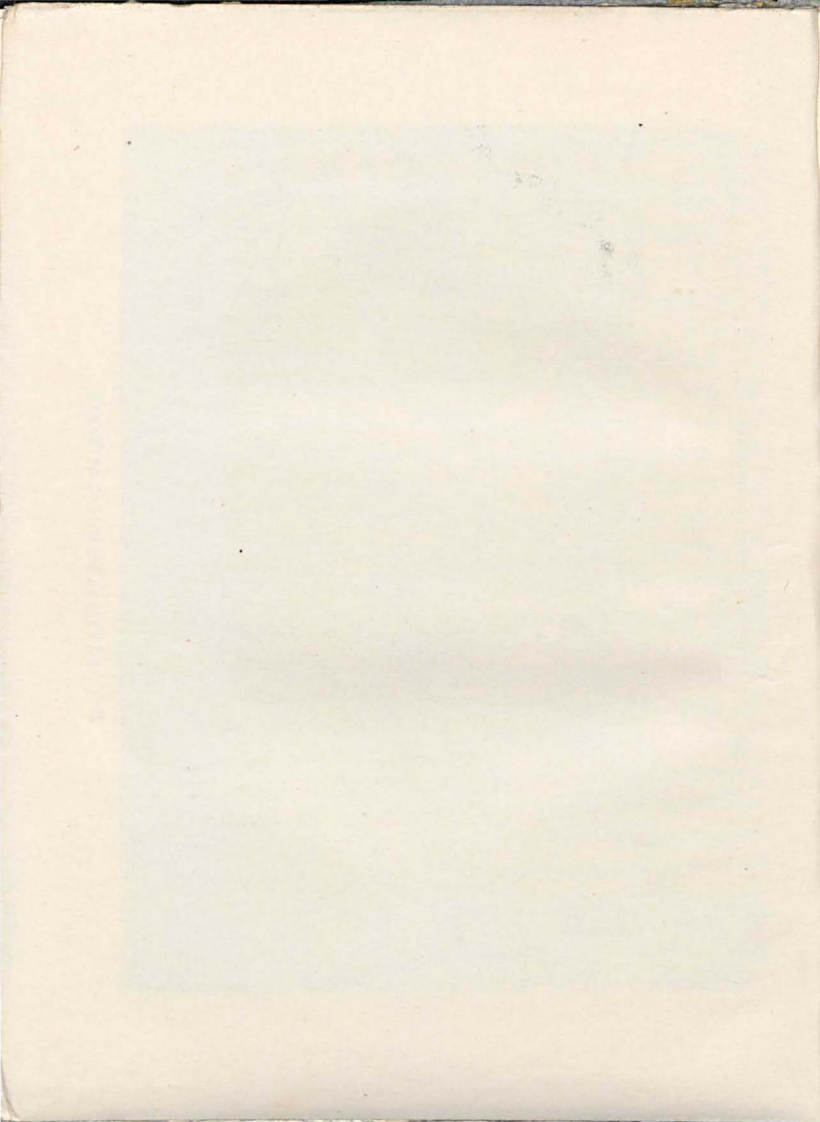
Stained
Glass

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still in constant request, fine designs are regularly produced by Mr. Henry Dearle, the artist who next to William Morris and Burne-Jones has done most to keep alive the traditions of colour and style out of which the firm grew up. It would be impossible in a short paragraph to do justice to the number and beauty of Morris windows to be found all over the country, as well as abroad. They will in all likelihood some day form the subject of a special book. Among the more imposing or famous examples, however, may be briefly mentioned those in St. Philip's Cathedral Church, Birmingham; in Salisbury, Christ Church, Llandaff, Norwich and Calcutta Cathedrals; All Saints and Jesus College, Cambridge; Holy Trinity, Boston, U.S.A.; Rugby College Chapel; Speldhurst, Easthampstead, Cheddleton, Meole Brace, Rottingdean, Lyndhurst, Hawarden, Aller-



Stained Glass Painters at Work



ton, and Tamworth churches. No one could ever fail, even at first sight, to recognize the Firm's stained glass wherever it is found, the qualities of drawing and colour, apart from the distinctive nature of the designs, rendering it quite conspicuous. It comes nearer to the spirit of ancient glass than any other, without however copying either the limitations under which the ancient glaziers laboured, before the introduction of the cutting diamond, or its mediaeval quaintnesses.

The earliest furniture made for William Morris was, as has been described, massive in form and decorated with paintings of figures or subjects from the romances. Some of that which was made by the Firm in its infancy was also painted, notably a Gothic canopied side-board designed by Mr. Philip Webb and Furniture

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repeated more than once. By degrees, however, cabinet work began to take the place of carpentry, and side by side with oak or stained ash furniture of a somewhat severe feudal type, the Firm produced rich inlaid cabinets and suites of fine construction and design, mostly by Mr. Webb and his successor Mr. George Jack. In its finish the cabinet work of Morris and Company will bear close comparison with the best productions of Chippendale or Sheraton, and in future days will probably rank with their creations. The best of the designs have a restraint and dignity which sets them quite apart from most modern furniture, even if the workmanship were not of so distinctive a class. Without sinking to the common craze for mere antiques, Morris and Company have reproduced some of the best forms of the Chippendale and Queen Anne

THE MORRIS MOVEMENT 55

period, especially in regard to carved drawing-room and dining-room chairs. Mr. Mervyn Macartney has also designed for them a cabinet and a sideboard on handsome classical lines.

In the same building as the cabinet and joinery works is an upholstery shop where all kinds of stuffed furniture are finished and covered. This in itself, with the making up or cleaning of curtains, blinds, carpets, cushions, etc., is a large and by no means unimportant business, constituting an entire department of the Firm. In the early days, the boards which Morris and Company used to affix to houses they were decorating bore the word "upholders." This archaic form has been dropped, but the work covered by it continues and has multiplied.

Upholstery

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Decorating

With all the foregoing industries at its command the Firm has always been in a position to undertake the entire furnishing, designing, and decorating of houses. In Queen Victoria's reign they carried out the decoration of St. James's Palace, for which many magnificent silks, wall-papers, and painted friezes were designed. Lord Carlisle's house in Palace Green is another notable specimen of their work, as also is Stanmore Hall near Bushey, to name but two conspicuous examples. William Morris's work, however, appeals to middle-class life quite as much as to such stately surroundings, and middle-class needs were prominently in his thoughts in designing the tapestries, chintzes, wall-papers, and carpets, which have so widely influenced public taste. No work is too small to be worth doing well, and just as Morris in his lifetime preached

Appeal to
middle-
class life

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the value and importance of "the lesser arts," from the maker's point of view, so from the householder's standpoint everything about him should be good and honest of its kind. In an age of pretence and shoddy, and of making the best show for the least money, such an axiom has to be repeated and insisted on, or it is in danger of being forgotten even by those least anxious to be corrupted by the common apathy. For what is good and honest the Morris firm stands and has stood, whether it be merely in the laying on of paint or the hanging of a paper, the dyeing of a thread or the weaving of a cloth. And those who think that work to be good must necessarily be costly will find that it is not always so. Morris liked to sell his wares cheaply, so long as they paid to make; and wished them to be within everybody's reach. And as they were then so they are now;

The cost of
good work

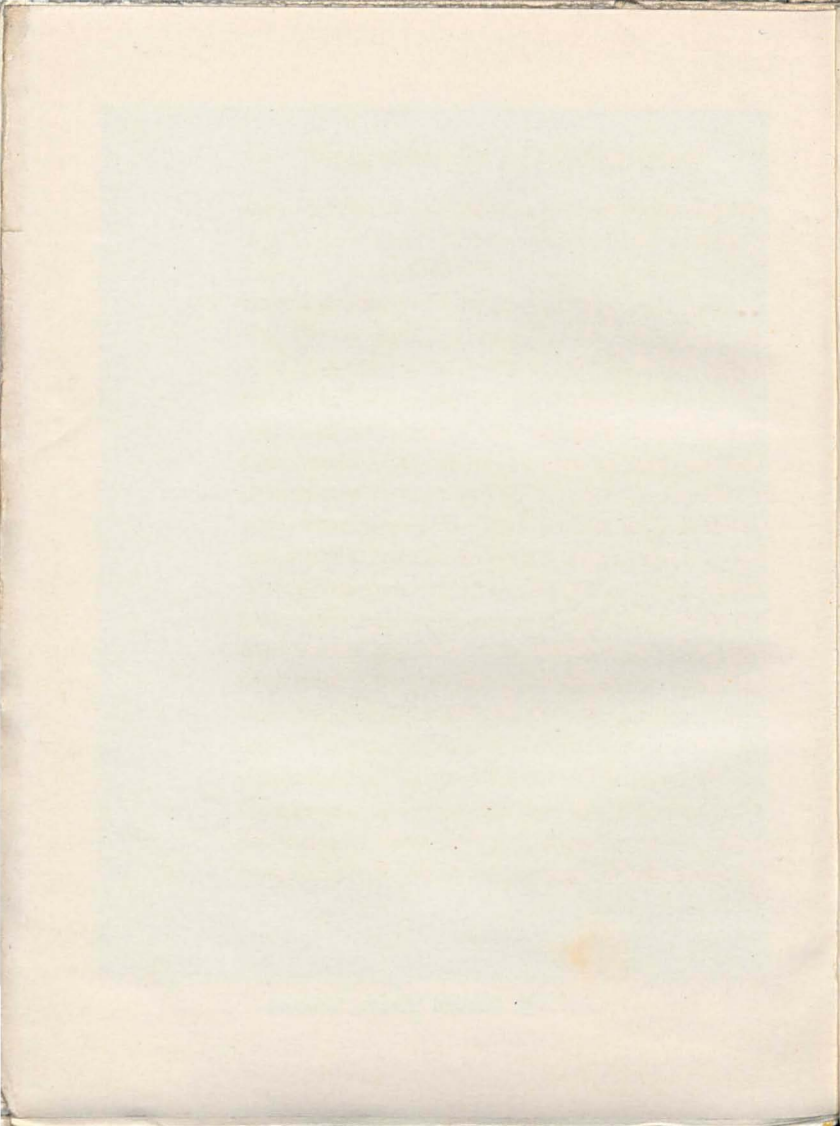
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not only "cheaper in the long run" as good work always must be, but actually cheaper in many respects to buy than the ordinary trade productions which have to be priced in the first instance to cover a profit for the middleman who sells (or sometimes only handles) the goods, as well as for the manufacturer who produces them.

It is perhaps worth mentioning here that, owing to the mode of their manufacture and the use of the ancient dyes, all Morris fabrics, papers, carpets, etc., go well and harmoniously together, and make a perfect scheme of decoration also with old furniture and oriental rugs. In the choice of these latter Morris was himself an expert judge. It was almost solely due to his efforts that the nation acquired the splendid Ardebil carpet in the South Kensington Museum, and the Firm have always kept a fine selection



No. 449, Oxford Street, London



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of oriental rugs in addition to their own make.

William Morris died in 1896, leaving the business in the hands of his two partners, Messrs. R. and F. Smith, and of Mr. Dearle his pupil, who managed the Merton Abbey works. In 1905, owing to the retirement of the partners, the Firm was taken over by the present management, and at the same time for convenience was made into a private company, with the addition of the word "Decorators" to its title. This, however, has involved no internal changes, and no deviation whatever from the old traditions and methods of manufacture, which continue as before, under the same direction as in William Morris's lifetime. If anything it may perhaps be claimed that the supervision of colours and the preservation of standards is stricter than before, and

The
Present-
Day Firm

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that several beautiful designs and patterns of early date which had fallen into disuse have been revived and are once more obtainable.

Popularity
of Morris
Style

The question is sometimes asked: "Do people still buy Morris goods?" The answer is "yes," and in larger numbers than ever, as the influence of the Morris movement penetrates further and further afield. India, Canada, America, Australia, and the Continent all furnish their quota of admirers of the Morris style and lovers of his pure bright colours and vigorous designs. In Germany there is a growing passion for them, owing to the reaction against "Art Nouveau" and Viennese checker-board designs. France remains almost a virgin field, and is faithful to French styles; yet even France wishes to have a comprehensive "Morris Exhibition" in 1912, which is to

THE MORRIS MOVEMENT 61

occupy a portion of the Louvre building. In England there remains a constant and growing *clientèle*, despite the tasteless return to early Victorian, and the monotonous repetition of so-called classic styles. What is sad, however, is that with the generation that knew him there is passing away the knowledge of Morris's immense personality, and of all that his art stands for.

The work of William Morris lives and must endure as long as there exists in the world an appreciation for original genius, such genius as guided the hands and brains of the great designers and colourists of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. But his name to-day, as so often happens with prophets, is held in greater honour abroad than in his own country. "We have got past Ruskin and Morris," as a Cambridge pedant observed slightly to Professor Sieper

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of Munich, who is one of the apostles of the Morris movement in Germany. "But what have you got that is as lasting or as good?" was the reply. The age of Morris and Ruskin and Burne-Jones was an age of giants, men of strong original minds and great intellectual personality. We have nothing like them to-day in literature or art. Critics and copyists abound, and traf-fickers in their ideas, and biographers by the score. These things are all symptoms of a barren, or at least a fallow time. Perhaps, in due course, a second Morris will arrive, with fresh ideas, as living and as great; possibly, though less probably, one endowed with his superhuman vigour and creativeness. But till he comes, the man who has done so much for life (not English life specially, but life all over the world); who has preached the gospel of good

work for its own sake, and of beauty above everything; who has done more than any seven others combined to put that gospel into practice—surely this man deserves that his name should be a household word in his own land, not only as much as, but, if anything, *more than* in any other.

If this little book succeeds in arousing the interest of even a few of the present generation to the value of the work that is being done in their midst, and to its history, and to the genius and effort which underlie it, the purpose will have been served. And, to conclude, let the following suggestive fact be noted, that though Morris in his lifetime produced as much as any seven ordinary men, the work he did that was never produced, the long series of finished trials or designs done that one only might be selected, was possibly seven times greater.



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